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SUBJECT: WAMY SECRETARY-GENERAL PREACHES NEED FOR INCREASED
UNDERSTANDING, COMPLACENTLY SUPPORTS EXTREMIST IDEOLOGIES

REF: JEDDAH 643

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission David Rundell
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (S/NF) SUMMARY: World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY)
Secretary-General Dr. Saleh al-Wohaibi told PolOffs in an

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August 27 meeting that, despite negative publicity
surrounding Islamic charities, WAMY has nothing to hide.
Al-Wohaibi talked about WAMY's international programs, but
focused primarily on problems facing Saudi youth today,
including the lack of employment opportunities and exposure
to extremist ideology. Dr. al-Wohaibi explained that WAMY
programs support Islamic youth development and are
implemented domestically and internationally. Dr. al-Wohaibi
said WAMY cannot control every speaker at youth summer camps,
including those who espouse extremist ideologies. Al-Wohaibi
railed against what he described as "Zionist control" over
the USG and media, saying it results in negative perceptions
of Islamic charities worldwide. END SUMMARY.

WAMY Worldwide

12. (S) PolOffs met on August 27 with World Assembly of
Muslim Youth (WAMY) Secretary-General Dr. Saleh al-Wohaibi,
along with two of his colleagues from the editorial and
public relations departments, at WAMY headquarters in Riyadh.
Dr. al-Wohaibi described WAMY's background and current
programming, noting that its international programs primarily
support youth camps and orphanages that benefit thousands of
children in Islamic countries, including southeast Asia, the
Middle East, Africa, Eastern Europe, and South America.
Al-Wohaibi pointed to WAMY programs in Brazil, Egypt,
"Palestine," Somalia, Chechnya, and Pakistan as examples of
some of its largest charity projects. He boasted about
WAMY's partnerships with the United Nations, particularly in
places where there is a vacuum of governance, such as Somalia
and "Palestine." He suggested that the U.S. should take
advantage of WAMY's accessibility to many states and partner
with it on some projects. Al-Wohaibi suggested that this
partnership could be one way to increase understanding of the
Muslim faith and community within the U.S., as well as
maximize the benefits provided by Islamic charities.

13. (S) When questioned about youth summer camps, al-Wohaibi
said WAMY is an open charity that aims to improve
opportunities for youth throughout the Islamic world and

stated that Saudi-based youth camps comprise a very small component of WAMY's activities. He insisted that increased "suspicion" surrounding summer camps resulting from their portrayal in the media as "terrorist breeding grounds" is unfounded. To combat this negative stereotype, WAMY opened access to the camps to local authorities. He stated that local authorities attended many youth camps this past summer in various countries. He noted that, in some countries, there were more media and government and security officials in attendance than there were youth. Despite the fact that the "open access" policy did not apply to Saudi Arabia this year, he welcomed our attendance at camps next summer. (NOTE: Attendance of non-Muslim observers has not been previously welcomed at WAMY's Saudi-based youth camps. PolOffs in Jeddah were refused access this summer for "security" reasons. END NOTE.)

Extremist Lecture at WAMY Youth Summer Camp Ignored

14. (C) Conservative Islamic cleric Sheikh al-Break reportedly gave a strong lecture this summer at one of WAMY's youth camps in Saudi Arabia. The lecture was anti-American in nature and al-Break accused many Saudi journalists of being "agents" of the West. Following the announcement of this lecture in the mainstream media, there was negative public reaction and calls for al-Break to apologize to the journalists. Dr. al-Wohaibi told PolOffs that, although it was unfortunate that al-Break's comments sparked such controversy in the media, it is "not possible to control" all of the information given during these lectures. WAMY is a major organizer of summer camps for children, said al-Wohaibi, and its focus is to encourage youth to engage in positive activities, such as sports and religious study,

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during their summer vacations. If some lecturers share extremist ideologies with the children, he said, it is unintentional. (NOTE: Al-Wohaibi's position precisely echoes statements made by International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO) Secretary-General Dr. Adnan Khalil Basha during a September 18 meeting with EmbOffs (reftel). END NOTE.)

Al-Wohaibi Claims U.S. Media Harms Islamic Charities

15. (C) In addition to its ongoing, youth-related activities, WAMY produces Al-Mustaqbal, a monthly magazine distributed in both English and Arabic, which addresses youth issues as they relate to Sunni Islam. Topics include how to use spare time effectively, to what extent religious diversity should be tolerated, and how democracy operates within the context of Sunni Islam. The text in the English-language version of the magazine given to PolOffs walks a fine line between promoting intolerance and condemning violence. In one article on the rights of non-Muslims in a Muslim state, it is written, "those who live in a Muslim state, and who have a different religion, or don't have any religion are not treated as enemies -- are not boycotted except if they start attacking other members of the society." Although the definition of "attack" is left open to interpretation in the magazine, al-Wohaibi's position was clearer. He indicated that he felt Islam in general -- and Islamic charities in particular -- are being "attacked" in the media by what he termed "Zionist" leaders in the U.S. Congress.

16. (C) Al-Wohaibi repeatedly condemned the U.S. media and Congress for promulgating "Zionist" policies that offend Muslims and impede the work of Islamic charities. In addition to condemning what he called "willful blindness" of the U.S. towards the Palestinian problem and the damage U.S. policies do to U.S.-Saudi relations, he also claimed that the U.S. media negatively stereotypes Muslims. He repeatedly said that these negative media portrayals do significant

damage to Islamic charities because they lead to increased investigations and suspicions, hence, decreased funding. He said that in order to solve this problem, there is an immediate need to increase understanding and tolerance in the U.S.

SAG Faces Different Challenges

¶7. (C) Al-Wohaibi did not acknowledge similar problems inside Saudi Arabia regarding the media or the SAG. The major problem that the SAG faces, he said, is the growing youth population and the lack of adequate educational and employment opportunities for them. This situation, in addition to increasing opportunities for youth to engage in extremist activities, particularly relating to Iraq, is a significant detriment to the stability of Saudi Arabia. To help combat this, said al-Wohaibi, WAMY's main goal in Saudi Arabia is to work with youth to ensure that they have a positive, peaceful, and secure future.

COMMENT

¶8. (C) Al-Wohaibi shared stories with PolOffs about his stay in Indiana, where he attended college, joined student groups, and even led a Muslim student union. He admitted these experiences paved the way for his current involvement with WAMY. He talked of the religious tolerance that he both witnessed and enjoyed in the U.S. in the 1970s, but expressed different thoughts on the need for religious tolerance today.

When al-Wohaibi spoke about different religions and the need to respect them, he indicated with hand gestures that Sunni Islam is above all other religions and sects. This attitude of inherent superiority was expressed throughout the meeting and clearly demonstrated the ideologies upon which WAMY bases its programs.

¶9. (S/NF) The Secretary-General appeared open and sincere during the discussion. His comments on the perceived inequities in the media were strong, but reflected the views of many Saudis that unfounded, one-sided, negative stereotyping has seriously damaged the image of Muslims

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around the world. However, al-Wohaibi's dismissal of the implications of the al-Break lecture was disturbing, particularly given his concern about public perceptions of the Muslim community and WAMY's stated objective of preventing youth from embracing radical ideologies. END
COMMENT.
OBERWETTER